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### Lear's Greatest Fault: Condemning Cordelia

In his play "King Lear," Shakespeare creates an explosive scene involving King Lear and his three daughters. In his old age, Lear decides to partition and give away his land according to which of his daughters proclaim their love most exuberantly to him. He asks his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and his youngest, Cordelia, to display who loves him most. While Goneril and Regan compete in their speeches to decide who loves their father most, Cordelia refuses to express her love in exaggerated terms. She simply states "I love your majesty according to my bond, no more nor less" (Act 1.1 lines 92-93). Her refusal to answer Lear's demand for a declaration of love reveals her true character, and proves that her love for her father is more than inheriting power or land. Her silence in response to his demand showcases her honest character.

Act 1.1 introduces us to King Lear, who in a public manner, asks Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia to: "tell me, my daughters... which of you shall we say doth love us most, that we our largest bounty may extend where nature doth with merit challenge" (lines 48-53). He decides that he will split the kingdom into three. His children are pressured at this moment to recollect the reasons they love their father. Goneril, who goes first at Lear's command states: "I love you more than word can wield the matter; dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty" (Act 1.1 lines 55-56). Upon hearing his oldest daughter's words, Lear grants Goneril a section of his land. By asking his children to praise him, he is able to boost his ego and increase his sense of self-importance.

After Goneril, Lear asks Regan to speak on behalf of his name. She answers: “In my true heart I find [Goneril] names my very deed of love; only she comes too short” (Act 1.1 lines 71-72). Shakespeare asks us to consider the line between fidelity and cloying in both Goneril and Regan’s speeches. Both older daughters use diction directed towards their own benefit, giving in to the King’s egotistical need for praise.

When it comes to Cordelia, King Lear says he “loves her most,” and hopes she will display her love in the court as her older sisters have (Act 1.1 ln. 124). In an act of defiance against her sister’s insincere speeches, Cordelia states: “I cannot heave my heart into my mouth. ... You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I return those duties back as are right fit, obey you, love you, and most honor you (Act 1.1 lines 91-92, 96-98). Cordelia does not deny loving Lear, but she focuses on the importance of her bond with him. She loves him according to her bond, and unlike her sisters, cannot make up other reasons she loves him. Cordelia’s refusal of a public and theatrical confession of love makes Lear resent her. Her character is honest, and she even confesses that if married, half her love will go to her husband.

In his anger, Lear makes the drastic decision to exile Cordelia: “thou hast her, France; let her be thine, for we have no such daughter, nor shall ever see that face of hers again. Therefore be gone, without our grace, our love, our benison” (Act 1.1 lines 268-271). He refuses to hear Kent’s council against disgracing his daughter, and he publicly disowns her. The scene after Lear exiles Cordelia shows her kind and honest character. She wishes the best for her family, and goes peacefully, but she does not regret or take back what she has said. She asks her sisters to “love well our father” (Act 1.1 ln. 277). Cordelia’s character represents the importance of love that Shakespeare showcases in the play. Lear’s arrogance results in the people’s distrust of him, and his loss of Cordelia.

Goneril notices her father's quick dismissal of Cordelia despite his love for her. She tells Regan, "you see how full of changes his age is. The observation we have made of it hath not been little. He always loved our sister most and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly" ( 294-297). Lear's tragic flaw, the mistreatment and exile of his favorite daughter, leads to his powerlessness as Goneril and Regan decide to take over, and leave Lear to ultimately die in his weakness. Both older daughters will dismiss Lear in his downfall and time of need.

Goneril and Regan's speeches in Act 1.1 foreshadow their true intentions. Both daughters use Lear's madness to exploit him and his power. After his downfall, Lear's daughters turn him out of the house and into the storm: "this house is little; the old man and's people cannot be well bestowed. / 'Tis his own blame; hath put himself from the rest and must needs taste his folly" (Act 3.1 lines 288-291). Both daughters, who had confessed their exaggerated love for their father in act 1.1, now decide to abandon him. Goneril and Regan strip Lear of his power, his supporting cast, and his regalness. Lear is faced with the consequences of his actions, and left wondering how he could have been so senseless as to exile the only daughter who cared about him and loved him.

When Cordelia comes back to see Lear in his time of weakness in act 4.7, she weeps for him. Upon seeing her father she tells him: "o my dear father, restoration hang thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss repair those violent harms that my two sisters have in thy reverence made" (Act 4.7 lines 27-30). Cordelia does not resent Lear for banishing her, but instead feels sorry for him. In his madness, he does not recognize her, and believes she is a spirit at first. Shakespeare keeps Cordelia's kindness persistent throughout the story, regardless of Lear's actions against her. She becomes the moral of the play, the representation of love as it is true and

has pure intentions. Everything goes back to Act 1.1 when she kept silent in the face of her own exile, even despite the deceiving speeches of her sisters.

Once Lear recognizes that it is his daughter Cordelia talking to him at this moment, he begins:

Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray weep not. If you have poison for me, I will drink it. I know you do not love me; for your sisters have as I do remember done me wrong. You have some cause, they have not (Act 4.7 lines 74-78).

Throughout his downfall, Lear believes that Cordelia is mad at him, and with good cause. Her tears here do not represent anger though, but instead her immense sadness. In the face of Lear's powerful demands, she refused to feed into his royal ego. Now, she watches as his legacy crumbles, and her sisters separate the kingdom. King Lear now accepts his loss of identity, and his tragic experiences. Throughout the play, he struggles to hold on to his royal identity, but here in front of Cordelia, he accepts his punishment and apologizes to her. He feels shame for treating Cordelia the way he has.

From the moment Lear asks Cordelia to praise him and his royalness, he falls, far beyond any abandonment he has ever known. He is disregarded by his older daughters, and by his people. He is exposed to the elements and left to suffer. In the last few scenes, Lear is restored to a quiet dignity, brought back into the world of care by which he was expelled by his own tragic flaws. Cordelia bends to kiss him, and he breaks from his madness shortly. It is here, as he talks to his daughter, that he understands why what he has done was wrong.

"King Lear" showcases the consequences of being conceited, and at the same time the play defines loyalty and love. Throughout his troubles and leading up to his death, Lear accepts and recognizes his faults. He talks to Cordelia about his mistakes, and feels sorry for banishing

her. Cordelia, the symbol of love and kindness in this play, stays true to her beliefs, and comforts her father in his ultimate time of need.